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Benin Musician Osayomore: I Would Have Failed in Music Career If I hadn't Married Many Women



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OSAYOMORE Joseph is the leader of Ulele musical band based in Benin-City. He is a household name in the ancient city and this has earned him recognition from the palace of the Oba of Benin as the first Bini musician to be so honoured by the palace. Osayomore has been in the music industry for over 45 years and has done over 104 songs, many of which remain evergreen till today. This vocal, fearless, widely travelled and resourceful musician recently let WESTERN POST into his world. AGENE AKHERE brings excerpts...

Who is Osayomore Joseph?

Ambassador Osayomore Joseph is a musician.

What is it about the stripe on your forehead?

Like every other brand, you have Mercedes Benz they have their logo, you see Coca cola, they have their logo. So this is Osayomore Joseph's logo, nothing more is attached. I just want to be seen on it and this has been my logo for the past 45 years.

You have been doing music for 45 years now?

I have been doing music for much more than that period, I am in my 60s now. I have not done any other job in my life apart from music. I am a product of the Nigerian Army School of Music, Lagos.

How did it start?

I started in the Army; I joined the Army when I left secondary school in 1960/1967, when I left secondary school I joined the Army in 1969 when the Nigeria/Biafra war was actually raging though it ended as early as 1970. I had been in the system for so long, it was from that I was deployed to the Army School of Music, Abati Barrack, Lagos. I was so lucky to have been trained in many parts of the world apart from Russia and China. I have gone to virtually every part of the world. I went to the Caribbean in Jamaica as a product of the Army School of Music. Well to God be the Glory, I have performed in every big cities in the world. I have performed in the United States of America, which I have been travelling to for the past 22 years. I have performed in London severally. I have performed in Dublin, Ireland, I have performed in virtually everywhere in Europe. My promoters come in here; we sign a deal and that is it. I don't just travel alone, I travel with the entire band and that is how I have been travelling for years.

Before you joined the Army, were you doing music?

No, I just left the college and like I said, I am a product of a renowned music institution.

Did it ever occur to you that you would be a musician some day?

I knew that because of my active role in school band in primary/secondary school band. My involvement actually showed when I started playing this native flute, we call it fafa those days and this has been in me. My mother was a musician though she was playing maracas and singing for politicians in those days. I knew it would come to that but it didn't occur to me that I was going to find my way into a renowned institution. It was by providence, an act of God that I got to where I found myself then as early as 1970. I was very young during the time of Victor Olaiya and Victor Uwaifo, though I met them playing.

One of your greatest hits was Efewedo

It didn't actually start with Efewedo, that was just one of those blockbuster tracks. When I was in Lagos what brought me to fame there was that 'When there is life there is hope,' 'Give women a chance' and a host of others that were recorded for Polygon Records. I came down to Edo State where I was born as a very young

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person, and then I was 27 and had left the Army at 26. It was then called Ekimogun Sound, now Supreme Disk that was where I recorded Efewedu that was heard in Lagos and across the globe.

What inspires you?

Music is one thing that I know, I have discovered on my own. A time comes when the wind will blow in the life of a successful musician and the wind are spiritual winds, winds that come with talents and the wind that come with the music in the musician. In the life of every musician, that wind must blow and when it blows, it becomes like Harmattan fire and that is how Efewedu came to be and it is still burning.

Was music paying the bills then?

(Cuts in) And it is still paying till tomorrow. I have never done any job in my life apart from music; from the age of 19 till date I have not done any job. My hands are made strong by the hands of the Almighty. I don't know how to step aside from this industry, only death will step me aside. A job that you continue to do no matter the ups and downs you come across, no matter how long, there will be a day the wind will blow and give you everything you need in life.

How exactly did you start playing music?

I started music not because of what I wanted to make out of it. I found myself in a situation where both my hands and my legs are tapping; my brain is telling me to say one or two things. Apart from the school I attended, music has been there in me. Then you play music for comfort and leisure. We thought it is a thing you could play and amuse people. But they misinterpreted the subject music then and said it was a job for the clubhouse. In fact parents don't count on us as good children. The society looked at us as wayward children but to God be the glory, people now bring their children for us to train. I came from a fairly less privileged home; my parents were not rich at all but today I made them rich though they are not alive. I didn't know what the future was for me and I didn't even see a thing that could benefit my future then.

Tell us about some of the chart busters

There are some of those songs that were chart busters like 'Baba na wa, Leave us alone, Evil days postponed' all in pidgin English. That was as a result of what I saw in America in 1992. I saw democracy at work in America and wondered why it will not work in a dark continent like Africa. As civilized as those people are, they obey simple instructions, they don't beat traffic light, they pay tax as and when due because they are protected by the government. If I record an album and it sells so well, I am supposed to be a millionaire but here piracy will make you poorer than you were when you recorded the album. I saw democracy at work in America, I spent 6 months there and then I rushed back home to partake in the election that was supposed to bring MKO Abiola to power. I played my role very well then only for the election to be annulled. That was what gave birth to militant songs; warfront songs and it didn't go down well with the military. I remember I went to see MKO Abiola before he was arrested, he sent for me and to use his exact words, he said: "I am the president of this country, I will swear myself in though I know I will be arrested but if I ever come back alive, then you are made" but he never returned. I think that is what has given me this fame.

How has modernity affected live band?

Those who play music with digital instruments have a very short life span to stay before going away. What will make me go to the studio and start pressing buttons, I see those musicians as love letter musicians. They will never have evergreen songs. I will advise them to go and sit down and study one instrument, and the art of composition.

What is your musical message?

People those days who used to sing love songs like the whites, where are they today? But Victor Uwaifo is still there, King Sunny Ade is still there and I Osayomore Joseph is here. They might have the money but they have very short live span to stay. Since 1970 till now is a very long time and I am still here. I look at them as clowning singing to a CD and dancing to it.

Uniqueness of Benin Music

I am a Benin man and I am grateful to God for bringing me through this part of the world. I am performing here I don't need to stress myself anymore, whatever I want, be it money or women, I have them enough, so what will I go and do elsewhere? I have gone round the country, I grew up in Lagos so I have a lot of regard for my dialect, I have been singing with it, it is so meaningful that even the whiteman wants to know the meaning of what I am saying based on the way it is coined. I am married with so many children and a harem of women and they are all with me.

How successful are you with many women?

This is the difference between me and others. I would have failed in my career if I had not married plenty women because I met my predecessors with plenty women. I don't know how to deviate from their ways now. They will swear for me wherever they are because I am playing the same instrument they played, and I am living their lifestyle. Whatever I do, emulating them is part of my success.

What projects are you working on?

Any musician that is still alive, can still see and he is not lame, deaf or dumb will continue to have new ideas till he dies. Anyone without such ideas or thinking has failed woefully. I have 14 graduates in this house so who is going to tell me that I am not successful in all ramifications? Who is going to say that musicians marry



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